

# **Speech and Language Impairment**

## **What is a Speech and Language Impairment ?**

Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) § 15-761(34) states that a “Speech/language impairment means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, severe disorders of syntax, semantics or vocabulary, or functional language skills, or a voice impairment...to the extent that it calls attention to itself, it interferes with communication or causes a child to be maladjusted.”

Speech and language impairments fall into two major categories. One has to do with the formation and production of speech sounds (articulation). The other has to do with attaching words to objects and ideas then stringing them together in a manner that makes sense (language and syntax).

When events such as illness or an accident happens before or after birth, variations and delays can occur which affect speech or language development. Language evolves the same way in all normally developing children. Those states of development that do not occur on time and in sequence may indicate a problem with learning to communicate. Speech or language impairment is some-times present in children who are developmentally delayed or have physical conditions such as cleft palate or vision or hearing losses. Conditions can develop that affect the manner in which a child processes language (the way the child understands it or produces it).

Some of the conditions which affect articulation can be severe, such as cerebral palsy, developmental disabilities, or central nervous system disorders. Others, while considered less serious, need early attention and treatment. Omitting, substituting, or distorting certain sounds is one disorder. Another, lisping, is considered an articulation disorder which occurs when the improper placement of the tongue affects the production of speech sounds.

Interrupted speech, or stuttering, is another condition which can be a cause for concern if not treated early. Stuttering affects the smooth delivery of spoken language ( fluency). It is considered a disability of childhood with onset before the age of six and is more prevalent in boys than in girls. The causes are not known, but are thought to be related to and triggered by specific situations.

Voice disorders are another form of speech impairment and are often found in combination with other conditions. Included in this category are irregularities in loudness, pitch, or hoarseness.

## **How Common is a Speech and Language Impairment?**

In the 2001-2002 school year, 18,090 students were classified as having a speech and language disorder and received special education services. This number represents 1.96 percent of the 922,280 children enrolled in Arizona public schools as of October 1, 2001.

## **What Effect do Speech and Language Impairments Have on Children?**

Since language is essential for learning, early diagnosis and treatment of impairments is important. School success relies on the ability of a student and his teacher to communicate and of the student to build peer relationships. Language skills are critical to these relationships.

Frequently parents are unaware of a problem until a child is screened for entrance to school. Kindergarten screening measures both expressive and receptive language development. Most screening devices check to see whether a child is developing typical language for his/her age. Because oral language is not regularly included in later academic testing, a child may first be noticed as language impaired when problems appear in academic areas. The problems may be present as difficulty in understanding language, processing meaning, or expressing oneself in words. Such difficulties often affect academic progress.

## References

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## Resources, articles, & books

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Linforts, J.W. (1987). *Children's language and learning* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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Schwartz, S.M., Heller, J.E. (1988). *The language of toys: Teaching communication skills to special needs children*. Rockville, MD: Woodbine House.

Silver, L.B., M.D. (1998). *The misunderstood child: Understanding and coping with your child's learning disabilities*. NY: Time Books.

*Stuttering and your child: Questions and answers*. Publication #22, Speech Foundation of America.

## Books for children

Cunningham, J. (1989). *Burnish me bright*. Magnolia, MA: Peter Smith Publishers.

Greenberg, J. (1986). *Exercises of the heart*. NY: Straus & Giroux.

Holcomb, N. (1990). *Sarah's Surprise*. Hollidaysburg, PA: Nordic Publishers.

Kneeland, L. (1989). *Cookie*. Hollidaysburg, PA: Jason & Nordic Press.

## Organizations, Hot Lines, Web Sites

Arizona Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 7622 N. 48th Dr., Glendale, AZ 85301, 623-939-6103  
[www.healthcaresource.com/arsha](http://www.healthcaresource.com/arsha)

Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Children with Communication Disorders, 1110 N Glebe Rd., Ste. 300  
Arlington, VA 22201-5704, 888-232-7733, [www.cec.sped.org/](http://www.cec.sped.org/)

Disabilities Help Line of Arizona, Community Information and Referral Services, 1515 E. Osborn, Phoenix, AZ 85024-4446,  
800-352-3792 or 602-263-8856, [www.cirs.org/](http://www.cirs.org/)

Enhancing Arizona's Parent Network (EAPN) [www.ade.state.az.us/ess/eapn](http://www.ade.state.az.us/ess/eapn)

Easter Seal Society, [www.easter-seals.org/](http://www.easter-seals.org/) 903 N. 2nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85004-1996, 602-252-6061, 602-254-3026 (TTY)  
5740 E. 22nd St., Tucson, AZ 85711, 520-745-5222. 661 E. 32nd. St., Ste. A, Yuma, AZ 85365, 520-726-6800

Institute for Human Development, Assistive Technology Center, Northern Arizona University, P.O. Box 5630,  
Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5630, 928-523-5878. [www.nau.edu/ihd](http://www.nau.edu/ihd)

Learning Disabilities Association of Arizona, 13106 W. Limewood Dr., Sun City West, AZ 85375, [www.LDAAmerica.org/](http://www.LDAAmerica.org/)

National Center for Neurogenic Communication Dis-orders (NCNCD), Bldg. # 71, P. O. Box 210071, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0071, 520-621-1472, [cnet.shs.arizona.edu/](http://cnet.shs.arizona.edu/)

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013-1492, 800-695-0285, [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

Parent Information Network, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, 1535 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-364-4015 or 800-352-4558, [www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals/](http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals/)

The Stuttering Foundation of America, P.O.Box 11749, Memphis, TN 38111-0749, 800-992-9392  
[www.stutterSFA.org](http://www.stutterSFA.org)

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